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The Appellation from the Sentence Pronounced by the Bishops and Clergy: Addressed to the Nobility and Estates of Scotland
1558

John Knox

Extracted from: *Selected Writings of John Knox: Public Epistles, Treatises, and Expositions to the Year 1559*

Editor's Note

After Knox's visit to Scotland, in 1555-56, the papal prelates tried the reformer *in absentia*, condemned him, and burned him in effigy (see p. 438). Such ecclesiastical tyranny was quite typical of the times.

Although the pestilent priests had rid themselves of an image of the reformer, they had not heard the last from his person. Soon after learning about the actions of his adversaries, Knox published an "appeal" of his case, directed to the Scottish nobility. In an eloquent and prophetic manner, the reformer declared to the nobles their duty to defend the innocent and punish evil-doers.

It is the responsibility of the nobles, as lesser magistrates, to suppress the evil designs of ecclesiastical tyrants. It is also the duty of these lesser magistrates to resist the tyranny of the chief magistrate, when he exceeds his God-given authority. Further, it is the responsibility of all men to promote true religion, and oppose idolatry and false religion.

In the reformer's *Appellation*, there are several themes which were later incorporated into the teachings of the Westminster Standards respecting the civil magistrate. The Westminster Confession provides a distinct echo of Knox, when it states that the magistrate "hath authority, and it is his duty, to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed" (Chapter 23:3, original wording). Similarly, the Westminster Larger Catechism, #108, notes that the second commandment requires "the disapproving, detesting, opposing, all false worship; and according to each one's place and calling, removing it, and all monuments of idolatry."

While Knox maintains a clear distinction between civil and ecclesiastical authority, he recognizes that both are under the sovereign authority of God; the Lord requires both civil and ecclesiastical rulers to fulfill their obligations regarding their own distinct duties and their responsibilities in relation to one another.

The Appellation from the Sentence Pronounced by the Bishops and Clergy: Addressed to the Nobility and Estates of Scotland

To the nobility and estates of Scotland, John Knox wishes grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, with the spirit of righteous judgment.

It is not only the love of temporal life (right honourables), neither yet the fear of corporeal death, that moves me at this present [time] to expone [*explain*] unto you the injuries done against me, and to crave of you, as of lawful powers appointed by God, redress of the same; [1]but partly it proceeds from that reverence which every man owes to God's eternal truth, and partly from a love which I bear to your salvation, and to the salvation of my brethren abused in that realm by such as have no fear of God before their eyes. It has pleased God, of his infinite mercy, not only so to illuminate the eyes of my mind, and so to touch my dull heart, that I see clearly, and by his grace unfeignedly believe, "that there is no other name given to men under the heaven, in which salvation consisteth, save the name of Jesus alone" (Acts 4:12): "who, by that sacrifice which he did once offer upon the cross, hath sanctified for ever those that shall inherit the kingdom promised" (Heb. 10:12-13); but also it has pleased him, of his superabundant grace, to make and appoint me, most wretched of many thousands, a witness, minister, and preacher of the same doctrine: the summary whereof I did not spare to communicate with my brethren (being with them in the realm of Scotland, in the year 1556), because I know myself to be a steward (1 Cor. 3), and that accounts of the talent committed to my charge shall be required by him who will admit no vain excuse which fearful men pretend (Matt. 25).

I did, therefore as God did minister, during the time I was conversant with them (God is record and witness) truly and sincerely, according to the gift granted unto me, divide the word of salvation, teaching all men to hate sin, which before God was and is so odious, that none other sacrifice could satisfy his justice except the death of his only Son; and to magnify the great mercies of our heavenly Father, who did not spare the Substance of his own glory, but did give him to the world to suffer the ignominious and cruel death of the cross, by that means to reconcile his chosen children to himself (John 3:16-17; Rom. 5, 8; 2 Cor. 5:18-19); teaching further what is the duty of such as do believe themselves purged by such a price from their former filthiness: to wit, that they are bound to walk in the newness of life, fighting against the lusts of the flesh, and studying at all times to glorify God by such good works as he has prepared for his children to walk in (Rom. 6, Eph. 4-5; Eph. 2:10).

In doctrine I did further affirm (so taught by my Master Christ Jesus), "that whosoever denieth him, yea, or is ashamed of him, before this wicked generation; him shall Christ Jesus deny, and of him shall he be ashamed, when he shall appear in his majesty" (Matt. 10:33). And therefore I feared not to affirm, that of necessity it is, that such as hope for life everlasting avoid all superstition, vain religion, and idolatry. [2]Vain religion and idolatry I call whatsoever is done in God's service or honour, without the express commandment of his own word.

This doctrine I did believe to be so conformable to God's holy scriptures, that I thought no creature could have been so impudent as to have damned any point or article of the same. [3]Yet, nevertheless, me, as an heretic, and this doctrine as heretical, have your false bishops and ungodly clergy damned, pronouncing against me a sentence of death, in testification whereof they have burned a picture. [4]From which false and cruel sentence, and from all judgment of that wicked generation, I make it known to your honours, that I appeal to a lawful and general council (to such, I mean, as the most ancient laws and canons do approve to be held, by such as whose manifest impiety is not to be reformed in the same), [5]most humbly requiring of your honours that (as God has appointed you princes in that people and, by reason thereof, requires of your hands the defence of innocents troubled in your dominion), in the meantime, and till the controversies that this day be in religion be lawfully decided, you receive me, and such others as most unjustly by those cruel beasts are persecuted, in your defence and protection.

Your honours are not ignorant, that it is not I alone who does sustain this cause against the pestilent generation of Papists; [6]but that the most part of Germany, the country of Helvetia, the king of Denmark, the nobility of Poland, together with many other cities and churches reformed, appeal from the tyranny of that Antichrist, and most earnestly do call for a lawful and general council, wherein all controversies in religion may be decided by the authority of God's most sacred word. And unto this same, as said is, do I appeal yet once again, requiring of your honours to hold my simple and plain appellation of no less value nor effect, than if it had been made with greater circumstance, solemnity, and ceremony; and that you receive me calling unto you, as to the powers of God ordained, in your protection and defence against the rage of tyrants not to maintain me in any iniquity, error, or false opinion, but to let me have such equity as God by his word, ancient laws, and determinations of most godly councils, grant to men accused or defamed.

The word of God wills that no man shall die, except he be found criminal and worthy of death for [an] offence committed: of the which he must be manifestly convicted by two or three witnesses (Deut. 17:6-7). Ancient laws do permit just defence to such as are accused (be their crimes never so horrible); and godly councils will, that neither bishop nor person ecclesiastical whatsoever, accused of any crime, shall sit in judgment, consultation, or council, where the cause of such men as do accuse them is to be tried.

[7]These things I require of your honours to be granted unto me: to wit, that the doctrine which our adversaries condemn for heresy may be tried by the simple and plain word of God, that just defences be admitted to us that sustain the battle against this pestilent generation of Antichrist, and that they be removed from judgment in our cause, [8]seeing that our accusation is not intended against any one particular person, but against that whole kingdom, which we doubt not to prove to be a power usurped against God, against his commandment, and against the ordinance of Christ Jesus established in his church by his chief apostles. Yea, we doubt not to prove the kingdom of the pope to be the kingdom and power of Antichrist. And therefore, my lords, I cannot cease, in the name of Christ Jesus, to require of you that the matter may come in examination; and that you, the estates of the realm, by your authority, compel such as will be called bishops, not only to desist from their cruel murdering of such as do study to promote God's glory in detecting and disclosing the damnable impiety of that man of sin (the Roman Antichrist), but also that you compel them to answer to such crimes as shall be laid to their charge for not righteously instructing the flock committed to their cares.

[9]But here I know two things shall be doubted: the former, whether my appellation is lawful and to be admitted, seeing that I am damned as an heretic; and secondarily, whether your honours are bound to defend such as call for your support in that case, seeing that your bishops (who in matters of religion claim all authority to appertain to them) have, by their sentence, already condemned me. The one and the other I nothing doubt most clearly to prove: first, that my appellation is most lawful and just; and secondarily, that your honours cannot refuse to defend me (thus calling for your aid), but that in so doing,[10] you declare yourselves rebellious to God, maintainers of murderers, and shedders of innocent blood.

[11]How just cause I have by the civil law (as for their canon [law], it is accursed of God) to appeal from their unjust sentence, my purpose is not to make long discourse. Only I will touch the points which all men confess to be just causes of appellation.

First, lawfully I could not be summoned by them, being for that time absent from their jurisdiction, charged with the preaching of Christ's evangel in a free city, not subject to their tyranny.

Secondarily, to me no intimation was made of their summons, but so secret was their surmised malice, that the copy of the summons being required was denied.

Thirdly, to the realm of Scotland I could have had no free nor sure access, being before exiled from the same by their unjust tyranny.

And last, to me they neither could nor can be competent and indifferent judges, for that, before any summons were raised against me, I had accused them by my letters published to the queen dowager, and had intended against them all crimes, offering myself, with hazard of life, to prove the same: for the which they are not only unworthy of ecclesiastical authority, but also of any sufferance within a commonwealth professing Christ. This my accusation preceding their summons, neither by the law of God, neither yet by the law of man, can they be to me competent judges, till place be granted unto me openly to prove my accusation intended against them, and they be compelled to make answer as criminals. For I will plainly prove that not only bishops, but also popes, have been removed from all authority and pronouncing of judgment, till they have purged themselves of accusations laid against them. Yea, further I will prove that bishops and popes most justly have been deprived from all honours and administration, for smaller crimes than I have to charge the whole rabble of your bishops.

[12]But because this is not my chief ground, I will stand content for this present [time] to show that it is lawful to God's prophets, and to preachers of Christ Jesus, to appeal from the sentence and judgment of the visible church to the knowledge of the temporal magistrate, who by God's law is bound to hear their causes, and to defend them from tyranny.

The prophet Jeremiah (ch. 26) was commanded by God to stand in the court of the house of the Lord, and to preach this sermon, in effect: that Jerusalem should be destroyed, and be exposed in opprobrium to all nations of the earth; and that also that famous temple of God should be made desolate like unto Shiloh, because the priests, the prophets, and the people did not walk in the law which God had proposed unto them, neither would they obey the voices of the prophets whom God sent to call them to repentance.

For this reason was Jeremiah apprehended, and a sentence of death was pronounced against him, and that by the priests, by the prophets, and by the people; which things being bruited [*reported*] in the ears of the princes of Judah, they passed up from the king's house to the temple of the Lord, and sat down in judgment, for further knowledge of the cause. But the priests and prophets continued in their cruel sentence, which before they had pronounced, saying, "This man is worthy of death; for he hath prophesied against this city, as your ears have heard" (Jer. 26:11) But Jeremiah, so moved by the Holy Ghost, began his defence against that their tyrannical sentence, in these words: "The Lord," said he, "hath sent me to prophesy against this house, and against this city, all the words which you have heard. Now therefore make good your ways, and hear the voice of the Lord your God, and then shall he repent of the evil which he hath spoken against you. [13]As for me, behold I am in your hands" (Jer. 26:12-15) so does he speak to the princes. "Do to me as you think good and righteous. Nevertheless know you this most assuredly, that if ye murder or slay me, ye shall make yourselves, this city, and the inhabitants of the same, criminal, and guilty of innocent blood. For of a truth the Lord hath sent me to speak in your ears all those words."

[14]Then the princes and the people (says the text) said, "This man is not worthy of death, for he hath spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God" (Jer. 26:16-19). And so after some contention the prophet was delivered from that danger. This fact and history manifestly proves whatsoever before I have affirmed: to wit, that it is lawful for the servants of God to call for the help of the civil magistrate against the sentence of death, if it is unjust, by whomsoever it is pronounced; and also that the civil sword has power to repress the fury of the priests, and to absolve whom they have condemned. For the prophet of God was damned by those who then only in earth were known to be the visible church: to wit, priests and prophets who were then in Jerusalem, the successors of Aaron, to whom was given a charge to speak to the people in the name of God, and a precept given unto the people to hear the law from their mouths (to the which, if any should be rebellious or disobedient, he should die the death without mercy) [Deut. 17:8-13].

These men, I say, thus authorized by God, first did excommunicate Jeremiah, for that he did preach otherwise than did the common sort of prophets in Jerusalem; and last apprehended him, as you have heard, pronouncing against him this sentence afore written: from the which, nevertheless, the prophet appealed that is, sought help and defence against the same, and that most earnestly did he crave of the princes. [15]For albeit he says, "I am in your hands, do with me as ye think righteous;" he does not contemn nor neglect his life, as though he regarded not what should become of him. But in those his words most vehemently did he admonish the princes and rulers of the people, giving them to understand what God should require of them.

As [if] he should say, "You princes of Judah, and rulers of the people, to whom appertains indifferently [*impartially*] to judge betwixt party and party (to justify the just man, and to condemn the malefactor) [Deut. 17, Jer. 1, Deut. 1, 10] : you have heard a sentence of death pronounced against me by those whose lips ought to speak no deception, because they are sanctified and appointed by God himself to speak his law and to pronounce judgment with equity. But as they have left the living God, and have taught the people to follow vanity, so have they become the mortal enemies to all God's true servants, of whom I am one, rebuking their iniquity, apostasy, and defection from God, which is the only cause [for which] they seek my life. But a thing most contrary to all equity, law, and justice it is, that I a man sent of God to call them, this people (and you), again to the true service of God, from the which you all are declined shall suffer the death, because that my enemies do so pronounce sentence. I stand in your presence, whom God has made princes; your power is above their tyranny. Before you I do expone [*set forth*] my cause; I am in your hands, and cannot resist to suffer what you think just. But lest that my lenity and patience should either make you negligent in the defence of me in my just cause (appealing to your judgment) either yet encourage my enemies in seeking my blood this one thing I dare not conceal: that if you murder me (which thing you do if you defend me not), you make not only my enemies guilty of my blood, but also yourselves, and this whole city."

By these words, I say, it is evident that the prophet of God, being damned to death by the priests and by the prophets of the visible church, did seek aid, support, and defence at the princes and temporal magistrates, threatening his blood to be required of their hands, if they by their authority did not defend him from the fury of his enemies; [16]alleging also just causes of his appellation, and why he ought to have been defended: to wit, that he was sent of God to rebuke their vices and defection from God, that he taught no doctrine which God before had not pronounced in his law, that he desired their conversion to God, continually calling upon them to walk in the ways which God had approved; and therefore does he boldly crave of the princes, as of God's lieutenants, to be defended from the blind rage and tyranny of the priests, notwithstanding that they claimed to themselves authority to judge in all matters of religion. And the same did he what time he was cast in prison, and thereafter was brought to the presence of King Zedekiah.

After, I say, that he had defended his innocence, affirming that he neither had offended against the king, against his servants, nor against the people, at last he made intercession to the king for his life, saying, "But now, my lord the king, take heed, I beseech thee, let my prayer fall in to thy presence; command me not to be carried again into the house of Jonathan the scribe, that I die not there" (Jer. 37:20).

And the text witnesses that the king commanded the place of his imprisonment to be changed. Whereof it is evident, that the prophet did [more] often than once seek help at the civil power; and that first the princes, and thereafter the king, did acknowledge that it appertained to their office to deliver him from the unjust sentence which was pronounced against him.

If any think that Jeremiah did not appeal, because he only declared the wrong done unto him, and did but crave defence, according to his innocence: let the same man understand, that none otherwise do I appeal from that false and cruel sentence which your bishops have pronounced against me. [17]Neither yet can there be any other just cause of appellation but innocence hurt, or suspected to be hurt, whether it is by ignorance of a judge, or by malice and corruption of those who, under the title of justice, do exercise tyranny. If I were a thief, murderer, blasphemer, open adulterer, or any offender, whom God's word commands to suffer for a crime committed, my appellation were vain, and to be rejected. But I being innocent yea, the doctrine which your bishops have condemned in me being God's eternal verity have no less liberty to crave your defence against that cruelty, than had the prophet Jeremiah to seek the aid of the princes and the king of Judah. But this shall more plainly appear in the fact of St. Paul, who, after he was apprehended in Jerusalem, did first claim the liberty of Roman citizens, for avoiding torment, what time that the captain would have examined him by questions (Acts 22-25); thereafter in the council, where no righteous judgment was to be hoped for, he affirmed that he was a Pharisee, and that he was accused of [preaching] the resurrection of the dead; and last, in the presence of Festus, he appealed from all knowledge and judgment of the priests at Jerusalem to the emperor: of which last point, because it does chiefly appertain to this my cause, I will somewhat speak.

After Paul had diverse times been accused, as in the Acts of the apostles is manifest, at the last the chief priests and their faction came to Caesarea, with Festus the president, who presented to them Paul in judgment, whom they accused of horrible crimes; which nevertheless they could not prove, the apostle defending that he had offended neither against the law, neither against the temple, neither yet against the emperor.

But Festus, willing to gratify the Jews, said to Paul, "Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things in my presence?" (Acts 25:9-11). But Paul said, "I stand at the justice seat of the emperor, where it behooveth me to be judged. I have done no injury to the Jews, as thou better knowest. If I have done anything unjustly, or yet committed crime worthy of death, I refuse not to die. But if there be nothing of these things true whereof they accuse me, no man may give me to them: I appeal to Caesar."

It may appear, at the first sight, that Paul did great injury to Festus the judge, and to the whole order of the priesthood, who did hope greater equity in a cruel tyrant, than in all that session and learned company. Which thing no doubt Festus did understand, pronouncing these words, "Hast thou appealed to Caesar? Thou shalt go to Caesar." As [if] he would say, "I, as a man willing to understand the truth before I pronounce sentence, have required of you to go to Jerusalem, where the learned of your own nation may hear your cause, and discern the same. The controversy stands in matters of religion. You are accused as an apostate from the law, as a violator of the temple, and transgressor of the traditions of their fathers, in which matters I am ignorant; and [I] therefore desire information by those that are learned in the same religion whereof the question is. And yet you do refuse so many godly fathers to hear your cause, and do appeal to the emperor, preferring him to all our judgments of no purpose belike [*probably*], but to delay time."

Thus, I say, it might have appeared that Paul did not only injury to the judge and to the priests, but also that his cause was greatly to be suspected; partly for that he did refuse the judgment of those that had most knowledge (as all men supposed) of God's will and religion; and partly because he appealed to the emperor, who then was at Rome, far absent from Jerusalem, a man also ignorant of God and enemy to all virtue. [18]But the apostle, considering the nature of his enemies, and what things they had intended against him, even from the first day that he began freely to speak in the name of Christ, did not fear to appeal from them, and from the judge that would have gratified them. They had professed themselves plain enemies to Christ Jesus, and to his blessed evangel, and had sought the death of Paul (yea, even by factions and treasonous conspiracy); and therefore by no means would he admit them either judges in his cause, either auditors of the same, as Festus required. [19]But grounding himself upon strong reasons to wit, that he had not offended the Jews, neither yet the law, but that he was innocent, and therefore that no judge ought to give him into the hands of his enemies grounding, I say, his appellation upon these reasons, he neither regarded the displeasure of Festus, neither yet the bruit of the ignorant multitude; but boldly did appeal from all cogitation of them, to the judgment of the emperor, as is said.

By these two examples, I doubt not but your honours do understand, that it is lawful to the servants of God, oppressed by tyranny, to seek remedy against the same, be it by appellation from their sentence, or by imploring the help of civil magistrates. For what God has approved in Jeremiah and Paul, he can condemn in none that are treated likewise.

I might allege some histories of the primitive church, serving to the same purpose: as of Ambrose and Athanasius, of whom the one would not be judged but at Milan (where his doctrine was heard of all his church, and received and approved by many), and the other would in no wise give place to those councils where he knew that men conspired against the truth should sit in judgment and consultation. But because the scriptures of God are my only foundation and substance, in all matters of weight and importance, I have thought the two former testimonies sufficient, as well to prove my appellation reasonable and just, as to declare to your honours that with safe conscience you cannot refuse to admit the same.

[20]If any think it arrogance or foolishness in me to compare myself with Jeremiah or Paul, let the same man understand, that as God is immutable, so is the verity of his glorious evangel of equal dignity, whensoever it is impugned, be the suffering members never so weak. What I think touching mine own person, God shall reveal, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed; and such as with whom I have been conversant can partly witness what arrogance or pride they espy in me.

But touching the doctrine and cause which that adulterous and pestilent generation of Antichrist's servants (who will be called bishops amongst you) have condemned in me, I neither fear nor shame to confess and avow, before men and angels, to be the eternal truth of the eternal God. And in that case, I doubt not to compare myself with any member in whom the truth has been impugned since the beginning. For as it was the truth which Jeremiah did preach in these words: "The priests have not known me," saith the Lord, "but the pastors have traitorously declined and fallen back from me. The prophets have prophesied in Baal, and have gone after those things which cannot help. My people have left the fountain of living waters, and have digged to themselves pits which can contain no water" (Jer. 1-2): as it was a truth that the pastors and watchmen (in the days of Isaiah [56:10-12]) were become dumb dogs, blind, ignorant, proud, and avaricious; and finally, as it was a truth that the princes and the priests were murderers of Christ Jesus, and cruel persecutors of his apostles (Acts 3-4); so likewise it is a truth (and that most infallible), that those that have condemned me (the whole rabble of the papistical clergy) have declined from the true faith, have given ear to deceitful spirits and to the doctrine of devils, are stars fallen from heaven to the earth, are fountains without water, and finally are enemies to Christ Jesus, deniers of his virtue [or, *verity*], and horrible blasphemers of his death and passion (1 Tim. 4:1-7; Jude 4-19; 2 Pet. 3).

[21]And further, as that visible church had no crime whereof justly they could accuse either the prophets, either the apostles (except their doctrine only), so have not such as seek my blood [any] other crime to lay to my charge, except that I affirm, as always I offer to prove, that the religion which now is maintained by fire and sword is no less contrary to the true religion taught and established by the apostles, than is darkness to light, or the devil to God; and also, that such as now do claim the title and name of the church are no more the elect spouse of Christ Jesus, than was the synagogue of the Jews the true church of God, what time it crucified Christ Jesus, damned his doctrine, and persecuted his apostles. And therefore, seeing that my battle is against the proud and cruel hypocrites of this age (as that battle of those most excellent instruments was against the false prophets and malignant church of their ages), neither ought any man think it strange, that I compare myself with them, with whom I sustain a common cause. Neither ought you, my lords, judge yourselves less indebted and bound to me, calling for your support, than did the princes of Judah think themselves bound to Jeremiah, whom for that time they delivered, notwithstanding the sentence of death pronounced against him by the visible church.

And thus much for the right of my appellation, which in the bowels of Christ Jesus I require your honours not to esteem as a thing superfluous and vain; but that you admit it, and also accept me in your protection and defence, that by you I may have assured access to my native country, which I never offended; to the end that, freely and openly, in the presence of the whole realm, I may give my confession of all such points as this day be in controversy; and also that you, by your authority which you have of God, compel such as of long time have blinded and deceived both yourselves and the people, to answer to such things as shall be laid to their charge. [22]But lest some doubt remain, that I require of you more than you are bound of conscience to grant: in few words, I hope to prove my petition to be such as without God's heavy displeasure you cannot deny. [23]My petition is, that you whom God has appointed heads in your commonwealth, with single eye, do study to promote the glory of God, to provide that your subjects be rightly instructed in his true religion; that they be defended from all oppression and tyranny; that true teachers may be maintained; and such as blind and deceive the people, together also with all idle bellies which do rob and oppress the flock, may be removed and punished as God's law prescribes. And to the performance of every one of these do your offices and names, the honours and benefits which you receive, the law of God universally given to men, and the examples of most godly princes, bind and oblige you.

My purpose is not greatly to labour to prove that your whole study ought to be to promote the glory of God; neither yet will I study to allege all reasons that justly may be brought to prove, [24]that you are not exalted to reign above your brethren, as men without care and solicitude. For these are principles so grafted in nature, that very ethnics [*pagans*] have confessed the same. For seeing that God only has placed you in his chair, has appointed you to be his lieutenants, and by his own seal has marked you to be magistrates, and to rule above your brethren, to whom nature, nevertheless, has made you like in all points (for in conception, birth, life, and death, you differ nothing from the common sort of men, but God only, as is said, has promoted you, and of his special favour has given unto you this prerogative to be called "gods" [Ps. 82:2, 6]): how horrible ingratitude were it then, that you should be found unfaithful to him that thus has honoured you?

And further, what a monster it were, that you should be proved unmerciful to them above whom you are appointed to reign, as fathers above their children? Because, I say, the very ethnics have granted that the chief and first care of princes, and of such as be appointed to rule above others, ought to be to promote the glory and honour of their gods, and to maintain that religion which they supposed to have been true; and that their second care was to maintain and defend the subjects committed to their charge in all equity and justice. I will not labour to show unto you what ought to be your study in maintaining God's true honour, lest that in doing so, I should seem to make you less careful over God's true religion, than were the ethnics over their idolatry. But because other petitions may appear more hard and difficult to be granted, I purpose briefly, but yet freely, to speak what God by his word does assure me to be true: [25]to wit, first, that in conscience you are bound to punish malefactors, and to defend innocents imploring your help; secondarily, that God requires of you to provide that your subjects be rightly instructed in his true religion, and that the same by you be reformed whensoever abuses do creep in by [the] malice of Satan and negligence of men; and last, that you are bound to remove from honour, and to punish with death (if the crime so requires) such as deceive the people, or defraud them of that food of their souls I mean God's lively word.

The first and second are most plain, by the words of St. Paul, thus speaking of lawful powers: "Let every soul," says he, "submit himself unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive unto themselves damnation. For rulers are not to be feared of those that do well, but of those that do evil. Wilt thou then be without fear of the power? Do that which is good, and so shalt thou be praised of the same: for he is a minister of God for thy wealth [*well-being*]. But if thou do that which is evil, fear: for he beareth not the sword for nought: for he is the minister of God, to take vengeance on them that do evil" (Rom. 13:1-4).

As the apostle in these words most straitly commanded obedience to be given to lawful powers, pronouncing God's wrath and vengeance against such as shall resist the ordinance of God; so does he assign to the powers their offices, which are to take vengeance upon evil doers, to maintain the well doers, and so to minister and rule in their office, that the subjects by them may have a benefit, and be praised in well doing. Now, if you be powers ordained by God (and that I hope all men will grant), then, by the plain words of the apostle, is the sword given unto you by God, for maintenance of the innocent, and for punishment of malefactors. But I, and my brethren accused with me, do offer not only to prove ourselves innocents in all things laid to our charge; but also we offer most evidently to prove your bishops to be the very pestilence who have infected all Christianity. And therefore, by the plain doctrine of the apostle, you are bound to maintain us, and to punish the others, being evidently convicted and proved criminal.

[26]Moreover, the former words of the apostle do teach how far high powers are bound to their subjects: to wit, that because they are God's ministers, by him ordained for the profit and utility of others, most diligently ought they to intend upon the same. For that cause assigned the Holy Ghost, commanding subjects to obey and pay tribute, saying, "For this do you pay tribute and toll" (Rom. 13:6): that is, because they are God's ministers, bearing the sword for your utility. Whereof it is plain, that there is no honour without a charge annexed. And this one point I wish your wisdoms deeply to consider, that God has not placed you above your brethren to reign as tyrants without respect of their profit and commodity. You hear the Holy Ghost witness the contrary, affirming that all lawful powers are God's ministers, ordained for the wealth [*well-being*], profit, and salvation of their subjects, and not for their destruction. [27]Could it be said (I beseech you) that magistrates, enclosing their subjects in a city without all victuals, or giving unto them no other victuals but such as were poisoned, did rule for the profit of their subjects? I trust that none would be so foolish as so to affirm; but that rather every discreet person would boldly affirm, that such as did so were tyrants unworthy of all regiment. If we will not deny that which Christ Jesus affirms to be a truth infallible to wit, that the soul is greater and more precious than is the body then shall we easily espy, how unworthy of authority are those that this day debar their subjects from the hearing of God's word, and by fire and sword compel them to feed upon the very poison of their souls, the damnable doctrine of Antichrist.

And therefore in this point, I say, I cannot cease to admonish your honours, diligently to take heed over your charge, which is greater than the most part of men suppose. [28]It is not enough that you abstain from violent wrong and oppression, which ungodly men exercise against their subjects; but you are further bound: to wit, that you rule above them for their wealth; which you cannot do if you, either by negligence (not providing true pastors), or yet by your maintenance of such as be ravening wolves, suffer their souls to starve and perish for lack of the true food, which is Christ's evangel sincerely preached. It will not excuse you in his presence, who will require account of every talent committed to your charge, to say that you supposed that the charge of the souls had been committed to your bishops. No, no, my lords, so you cannot escape God's judgment. For if your bishops are proved to be no bishops, but deceitful thieves and ravening wolves [29] (which I offer myself to prove by God's word, by law and councils, yea, by the judgment of all the godly learned from the primitive church to this day), then shall your permission and defence of them be reputed before God, a participation with their theft and murder. For thus the prophet Isaiah accused the princes of Jerusalem: "Thy princes," says he, "are apostates:" that is, obstinate refusers of God, "and they are companions of thieves" (Isa. 1:23).

This grievous accusation was laid against them, albeit they ruled in that city which sometime was called holy, where then were the temple, rites, and ordinances of God; because not only were they wicked themselves, but chiefly because they maintained wicked men, their priests and false prophets, in honours and authority. If they did not escape this accusation of the Holy Ghost in that age, look you neither to escape the accusation nor the judgment which is pronounced against the maintainers of wicked men: to wit, that the one and the other shall drink the cup of God's wrath and vengeance together (Jer. 23, 27, Ezek. 13, Hos. 4). And lest you should deceive yourselves, esteeming your bishops to be virtuous and godly, this I do affirm, and offer myself to prove the same, that more wicked men than are the whole rabble of your clergy, were never from the beginning universally known in any age; yea, Sodom and Gomorrah may be justified in their respect. For they permitted just Lot to dwell amongst them without any violence done to his body, which that pestilent generation of your shaven sort does not, but most cruelly persecutes by fire and sword the true members of Christ's body, for no other cause but for the true service and honouring of God.

And therefore I fear not to affirm, that which God shall one day justify: that by your offices you are bound, not only to repress their tyranny, but also to punish them as thieves and murderers, as idolaters and blasphemers of God, and in their rooms you are bound to place true preachers of Christ's evangel, for the instruction, comfort, and salvation of your subjects, above whom else the Holy Ghost never shall acknowledge that you rule in justice for their profit.[30] If you pretend to possess the kingdom with Christ Jesus, you may take example neither by the ignorant multitude of princes, neither by the ungodly and cruel rulers of the earth of whom some pass their time in sloth, insolence, and riot, without respect had to God's honour, or to the salvation of their brethren; and others most cruelly oppress, with proud Nimrod, such as be subject to them. But your pattern and example must be the practice of those whom God has approved by the testimony of his word, as after shall be declared.

Of the premises it is evident, that to lawful powers is given the sword for punishment of malefactors, for maintenance of innocents, and for the profit and utility of their subjects. Now let us consider, whether the reformation of religion fallen in decay, and punishment of false teachers, do appertain to the civil magistrate and nobility of any realm. I am not ignorant that Satan of old time, for maintenance of his darkness, has obtained of the blind world two chief points. [31] Former [*first*], he has persuaded to princes, rulers, and magistrates, that the feeding of Christ's flock appertains nothing to their charge, but that it is rejected [*devolved*] upon the bishops and estate ecclesiastical; and secondarily, that the reformation of religion (be it never so corrupt), and the punishment of such as be sworn soldiers in their kingdom, are exempt from all civil power, and are reserved to themselves, and to their own cognition. But that no offender can justly be exempted from punishment, and that the ordering and reformation of religion (with the instruction of subjects), does especially appertain to the civil magistrate, shall God's perfect ordinance, his plain word, and the facts and examples of those that of God are highly praised, most evidently declare.

[32]When God did establish his law, statutes, and ceremonies in the midst of Israel, he did not exempt the matters of religion from the power of Moses; but as he gave him charge over the civil polity, so he put in his mouth and in his hand: that is, he first revealed to him, and thereafter commanded to put in practice whatsoever was to be taught or done in matters of religion (Ex. 21, 24-25). Nothing did God reveal particularly to Aaron, but altogether was he commanded to depend from the mouth of Moses. [33]Yea, nothing was he permitted to do to himself or to his children either, in his or their inauguration and sanctification to the priesthood, but all was committed to the care of Moses. And therefore were these words so frequently repeated to Moses: "Thou shalt separate Aaron, and his sons, from the midst of the people of Israel, that they may execute the office of the priesthood. Thou shalt make unto them garments, thou shalt anoint them, thou shalt wash them, thou shalt fill their hands with the sacrifice" (Ex. 28).

And so forth, of every rite and ceremony that was to be done unto them, especial commandment was given unto Moses, that they should do it. Now if Aaron and his sons were so subject to Moses, that they did nothing but at his commandment, who dare be so bold as to affirm, that the civil magistrate has nothing to do in matters of religion! For seeing that then God did so straitly require, that even those who did bear the figure of Christ should receive from the civil power, as it were, their sanctification and entrance into their office; and seeing that Moses was so far preferred to Aaron, that the one commanded and the other did obey; who dare esteem that the civil power is now become so profane in God's eyes, that it is sequestered from all intromission [*admission*] with the matters of religion? The Holy Ghost in diverse places declares the contrary. For one of the chief precepts commanded to the king, when he should be placed in his throne, was to write the example [*a copy*] of the book of the Lord's law, that is should be with him, that he might read in it all the days of his life, that he might learn to fear the Lord his God, and to keep all the words of his law, and his statutes to do them (Deut. 17:18-20). This precept requires, not only that the king should himself fear God, keep his law and statutes, but that also he, as the chief ruler, should provide that God's true religion should be kept inviolate of the people and flock, which by God were committed to his charge.

[34]And this did not only David and Solomon perfectly understand, but also some godly kings in Judah, after the apostasy and idolatry that infected Israel by the means of Jeroboam, did practice their understanding, and execute their power in some notable reformations. For Asa and Jehoshaphat, kings in Judah, finding the religion altogether corrupt, did apply their hearts (says the Holy Ghost) to serve the Lord, and to walk in his ways; and thereafter does witness, that Asa removed from honours his mother (some say grandmother), because she had committed and laboured to maintain horrible idolatry (2 Chron 14, 17). [35]And Jehoshaphat did not only refuse strange gods himself, but also destroying the chief monument of idolatry, did send forth the Levites to instruct the people: whereof it is plain, that the one and the other did understand such reformations to appertain to their duties.

But the facts of Hezekiah, and of Josiah, do more clearly prove the power and duty of the civil magistrate in the reformation of religion. Before the reign of Hezekiah, so corrupt was the religion that the doors of the house of the Lord were shut up, the lamps were extinguished, no orderly sacrifice was made. But in the first year of his reign, the first month of the same, did the king open the doors of the temple, bring in the priests and the Levites, and assembling them together, did speak unto them as follows: [36]"Hear me, O ye Levites, and be sanctified now, and sanctify also the house of the Lord God of your fathers, and carry forth from the sanctuary all filthiness" he means all monuments and vessels of idolatry (1 Chron. 29). "For our fathers have transgressed, and have committed wickedness in the eyes of the Eternal, our God; they have left him, and have turned their faces from the tabernacle of the Lord, and therefore is the wrath of the Lord come upon Judah and Jerusalem. Behold, our fathers have fallen by the sword, our sons, daughters, and wives are led in captivity. But now have I purposed in my heart to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel, that he may turn the wrath of his fury from us. And therefore, my sons" he sweetly exhorts "be not faint: for the Lord hath chosen you to stand in his presence, and to serve him."

Such as be not more than blind, clearly may perceive that the king does acknowledge, that it appertained to his charge to reform the religion, to appoint the Levites to their charges, and to admonish them of their duty and office, which thing he more evidently declares, writing his letters to all Israel, to Ephraim, and Manasseh, and sent the same by the hands of messengers, having this tenor: "You sons of Israel, return to the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and he shall return to the residue that resteth from the hands of Assyria. Be not as your fathers, and as your brethren were, who have transgressed against the Lord God of their fathers, who hath made them desolate, as you see. Hold not your heart therefore, but give your hand unto the Lord; return unto his sanctuary; serve him and he shall show mercy unto you, to your sons, and daughters, that be in bondage: for he is pitiful and easy to be entreated" (2 Chron. 30:6-9).

Thus far did Hezekiah by letters and messengers provoke the people declined from God to repentance, not only in Judah where he reigned lawful king, but also in Israel, subject to another king. [37]And albeit that by some wicked men his messengers were mocked, yet as they lacked not their just punishment (for within six years after Samaria was destroyed and Israel led captive by Shalmanesar), so did not the zealous King Hezekiah desist to prosecute his duty in restoring the religion to God's perfect ordinance, removing all abominations.

The same is to be read of Josiah, who did not only restore the religion, but did further destroy all monuments of idolatry, which of long time had remained (2 Chron. 34). For it is written of him, that after the book of the law was found, and that he had asked counsel at the prophetess Huldah, he sent and gathered all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem; and standing in the temple of the Lord, he made a covenant that all the people, from the great to the small, should walk after the Lord, should observe his law, statutes, and testimonies, with all their heart and all their soul, and that they should ratify and confirm whatsoever was written in the book of God. [38]He further commanded Hilkiah the high priest, and the priests of the inferior order, that they should carry forth of the temple of the Lord all the vessels that were made to Baal, which he burnt, and did carry their powder to Bethel. He did further destroy all monuments of idolatry, yea, even those that had remained from the days of Solomon. He did burn them, stamp them to powder; whereof one part he scattered in the brook Kidron, and the other upon the sepulchres and graves of the idolaters, whose bones he did burn upon the altars, where before they made sacrifice, not only in Judah, but also in Bethel, where Jeroboam had erected his idolatry (2 Kings 23). Yea, he further proceeded, and did kill the priests of the high places, who were idolaters and had deceived the people; he did kill them, I say, and did burn their bones upon their own altars, and so returned to Jerusalem. This reformation made Josiah, and for the same obtained this testimony of the Holy Ghost, that neither before him, neither after him, was there any such king, who returned to God with his whole soul, and with all his strength, according to the law of Moses.

Of which histories it is evident, that the reformation of religion in all points, together with the punishment of false teachers, does appertain to the power of the civil magistrate. For what God required of them, his justice must require of others having the like charge and authority; what he did approve in them, he cannot but approve in all others who, with like zeal and sincerity, do enterprise to purge the Lord's temple and sanctuary. What God required of them, it is before declared: to wit, that most diligently they should observe his law, statutes, and ceremonies. And how acceptable were their facts to God, he does himself witness (2 Chron. 32). For to some he gave most notable victories without the hand of man, and in their most desperate dangers did

For to some he gave most notable victories without the hand of man, and in their most desperate dangers did declare his especial favours towards them by supernatural signs; to others, he so established the kingdom, that their enemies were compelled to stoop under their feet. And the names of all he has registered not only in the book of life, but also in the blessed remembrance of all posterity since their days, which also shall continue till the coming of the Lord Jesus, who shall reward with the crown of immortality, not only them, but also such as unfeignedly study to do the will and to promote the glory of his heavenly father, in the midst of this corrupt generation. In consideration whereof ought you, my lords, all delay set apart, to provide for the reformation of religion in your dominions and bounds, which now is so corrupt, that no part of Christ's institution remains in the original purity; and therefore of necessity it is, that speedily you provide for reformation, or else you declare yourselves, not only void of love towards your subjects, but also to live without care of your own salvation, yea, without all fear and true reverence of God.

Two things perchance may move you to esteem these histories, before briefly touched, to appertain nothing to you. [39]First, because you are no Jews, but Gentiles; and secondarily, because you are no kings, but nobles in your realm. But be not deceived, for neither of both can excuse you in God's presence from doing your duty; for it is a thing more than certain, that whatsoever God required of the civil magistrate in Israel or Judah, concerning the observation of true religion during the time of the law, the same does he require of lawful magistrates professing Christ Jesus in the time of the gospel, as the Holy Ghost has taught us by the mouth of David, saying, Psalm 2, "Be learned you that judge the earth. Kiss the Son, lest that the Lord wax angry, and that ye perish from the way" (Ps. 2:10).

This admonition did not extend to the judges under the law only, but also does include all such as be promoted to honours in the time of the gospel, when Christ Jesus does reign and fight in his spiritual kingdom, whose enemies in that Psalm are first most sharply taxed, their fury expressed, and vanity mocked; and then are the kings and judges, who think themselves free from all law and obedience, commanded to repent [of] their former blind rage, and judges are charged to be learned; and last, all are commanded to serve the Eternal in fear, to rejoice before him in trembling, to kiss the Son (that is, to give unto him most humble obedience): whereof it is evident that the rulers, magistrates, and judges, now in Christ's kingdom, are no less bound to obedience unto God, than were those under the law.

And how is it possible that any shall be obedient who despise his religion, in which stands the chief glory that man can give to God, and is a service which God especially requires of kings and rulers? Which thing St. Augustine did plainly note,[40] writing to one Boniface, a man of war, according to the same argument and purpose, [of] which I labour to persuade your honours. For after he has in that his epistle declared the difference betwixt the heresy of the Donatists and Arians, and has somewhat spoken of their cruelty, he shows the way how their fury should and ought to be repressed, and that it is lawful for the unjustly afflicted to seek support and defence at godly magistrates. For thus he writes, [41]"Either must the verity be kept close, or else must their cruelty be sustained."

But if the verity should be concealed, not only should none be saved nor delivered by such silence, but also should many be lost through their deception. But if by preaching of the verity, their fury should be provoked more to rage, and by that means yet some were delivered, and made strong, yet should fear hinder many weaklings to follow the verity, if their rage be not stayed. In these first words Augustine shows three reasons why the afflicted church, in those days, called for the help of the emperor and of godly magistrates, against the fury of persecutors.

[42]The first, the verity must be spoken, or else mankind shall perish in error.

The second, the verity being plainly spoken provokes the adversaries to rage.

And because some did allege that rather we ought to suffer all injury, than to seek support by man, he adds the third reason: to wit, that many weak ones be not able to suffer persecution and death for the truth's sake, to whom not the less respect ought to be had, that they may be won from error, and so be brought to greater strength.

O that the rulers of this age should ponder and weigh the reasons of this godly writer, and provide the remedy which he requires in these words following: [43]"Now when the church was thus afflicted, if any think, that rather they should have sustained all calamity, than that the help of God should have been asked by Christian emperors, he does not well advert, that of such negligence no good account or reasons could be given. For where such as would that no just laws should be made against their impiety, allege that the apostles sought no such thing of the kings of the earth, they do not consider that then the time was other than it is now, and that all things are done in their own time. What emperor then believed in Christ, that should serve him in making laws for godliness against impiety?

"While yet that saying of the prophet was complete, 'Why hath nations raged, and people have imagined vanity? The kings of the earth have stood up, and princes have convened together against the Lord, and against his anointed;' that which is after said in the same psalm was not yet come to pass: 'And now understand, O you kings; be learned, you that judge the earth. Serve the Lord in fear, and rejoice to him with trembling' (Ps. 2:1-2, 10-12). [44]How do kings serve the Lord in fear, but in punishing, and by a godly severity, forbidding those things which are done against the commandment of the Lord? For otherwise does he serve insofar as he is man, otherwise insofar as he is king. [45]Insofar as he is man, he serves him by living faithfully; but because he is also king, he serves [by] establishing laws that command the things that are just, and [laws] that with a convenient rigour forbid things contrary: as Hezekiah served, destroying the groves, the temples of idols, and the places which were built against God's commandment. So also served Josiah doing the same; so served the king of [the] Ninevites, compelling the whole city to mitigate the Lord; so served Darius, giving in the power of Daniel the idol to be broken, and his enemies to be cast to the lions; so served Nebuchadnezzar, by a terrible law, forbidding all that were in his realm to blaspheme God (2 Kings 18:4; 2 Chron. 29-31; 34:1-7; 2 Kings 23: 5-25; Jonah 3:6-10; Dan. 6:24-27; 3:29). Herein therefore do kings serve the Lord insofar as they are kings, when they do those things to serve him which none except kings are able to do. [46]He further proceeds and concludes that, as when wicked kings do reign impiety cannot be bridled by laws, but rather is tyranny exercised under the title of the same; so is it a thing without all reason that kings professing the knowledge and honour of God, should not regard nor care who did defend, nor who did oppugn the church of God in their dominions."

By these words of this ancient and godly writer, your honours may perceive what I require of you: to wit, to repress the tyranny of your bishops, and to defend the innocent professing the truth. He did require of the emperor and kings of his days professing Christ, and manifestly concludes, that they can not serve Christ, except that so they do. Let not your bishops think that Augustine speaks for them, because he names the church. Let them read and understand that Augustine writes for that church which professes the truth, and does suffer persecution for the defence of the same which your bishops do not, but rather (with the Donatists and Arians) do cruelly persecute all such as boldly speak Christ's eternal verity, to manifest their impiety and abomination. [47]But thus much we have of Augustine, that it appertains to the obedience and service which kings owe to God, as well now in the time of the gospel as before under the law, to defend the afflicted for matters of religion, and to repress the fury of the persecutors by the rigour and severity of godly laws. For which cause, no doubt, does Isaiah the prophet say that "kings should be nourishers to the church of God, that they should abase their heads, and lovingly embrace the children of God" (Isa. 49:23). And thus, I say, your honours may evidently see, that the same obedience does God require of rulers and princes in the time of the gospel, [as] he required in the time of the law.

[48]If you do think that the reformation of religion, and defence of the afflicted, does not appertain to you (because you are no kings, but nobles and estates of a realm), in two things you are deceived: former, in that you do not avert that David requires as well that princes and judges of the earth be learned (and that they serve and fear God), as he requires that the kings repent. If you therefore are judges and princes, as no man can deny you to be, then by the plain words of David you are charged to be learned, to serve and fear God, which you cannot do if you despise the reformation of his religion. And this is your first error. The second is that you neither know your duty (which you owe to God), neither yet your authority (which of him you have received), if you for pleasure, or fear of any earthly man, despise God's true religion and contemn your brethren that in his name call for your support. Your duty is to hear the voice of the Eternal your God, and unfeignedly to study to follow his precepts; who, as is before said, of especial mercy has promoted you to honours and dignity. His chief and principal precept is that with reverence you receive and embrace his only beloved Son Jesus; that you promote, to the uttermost of your powers, his true religion; and that you defend your brethren and subjects whom he has put under your charge and care.

Now if your king is a man ignorant of God, enemy to his true religion, blinded by superstition, and a persecutor of Christ's members: shall you be excused, if with silence you pass over his iniquity? Be not deceived, my lords. You are placed in authority for another purpose than to flatter your king in his folly and blind rage: to wit, that as with your bodies, strength, riches, and wisdom, you are bound to assist and defend him in all things which by your advice he shall take in hand, for God's glory, and for the preservation of his commonwealth and subjects; so by your gravity, counsel, and admonition, you are bound to correct and repress whatsoever you know him to attempt expressly repugning to God's word, honour, glory, or what you shall espy him to do (be it by ignorance, or be it by malice) against his subjects great or small. Of which last part of your obedience, if you defraud your king, you commit treason against him no less than if you did extract [*remove*] from him your due and promised support, what time he were unjustly pursued by his enemies. But this part of their duty, I fear, do a small number of the nobility of this age rightly consider; neither yet will they understand, that for that purpose God has promoted them. For now the common song of all men is, "We must obey our kings, be they good or be they bad; for God has so commanded." But horrible shall the vengeance be, that shall be poured forth upon such blasphemers of God's holy name and ordinance. For it is no less blasphemy to say that God has commanded kings to be obeyed, when they command impiety, than to say that God by his precept is author and maintainer of all iniquity.

True it is, God has commanded kings to be obeyed; but likewise true it is, that in things which they commit against his glory or when cruelly without cause they rage against their brethren, the members of Christ's body he has commanded no obedience, but rather he has approved, yea, and greatly rewarded, such as have opposed themselves to their ungodly commandments and blind rage; as in the example of the three children, of Daniel, and Ebed-melech, it is most evident. The three children would neither bow nor stoop before the golden image at the commandment of the great King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel did openly pray, his windows being open, against the established law of Darius and of his council; and Ebed-melech feared not to enter in before the presence of Zedekiah, and boldly to defend the cause and innocence of Jeremiah the prophet, whom the king and his council had condemned to death (Jer. 38). Every one of these facts should this day be judged foolish by such as will not understand what confession God does require of his children, when his verity is oppugned, or his glory is called in doubt. Such men, I say, as prefer man to God, and things present to the heavenly inheritance, should have judged every one of these facts, stubborn disobedience, foolish presumption, and singularity, or else bold controlling of the king and his wise council.

But how acceptable in God's presence was this resistance to the ungodly commandments and determinations of their king, the end did witness. For the three children were delivered from the furnace of fire (and Daniel from the den of lions) to the confusion of their enemies, to the better instruction of the ignorant kings, and to the perpetual comfort of God's afflicted children. And Ebed-melech, in the day of the Lord's visitation, when the king and his council did drink the bitter cup of God's vengeance, did find his life for a prayer, and did not fall in the edge of the sword, when many thousands did perish. And this was signified unto him by the prophet himself at the commandment of God, before Jerusalem was destroyed. The promise and cause were recited unto him in these words: "I will bring my words upon this city unto evil, and not unto good; but most assuredly I shall deliver thee, because thou hast trusted in me," says the Lord (Jer. 39:16-18). The trust and hope, which Ebed-melech had in God, made him bold to oppose himself, being but one, to the king and to his whole council, who had condemned to death, the prophet, whom his conscience did acknowledge to be innocent. For this did he speak in the presence of the king sitting in the port of Benjamin. "My lord the king," says Ebed-melech, "these men do wickedly in all things that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet" (Jer. 38:9).

Advert and take heed, my lords, that the men who had condemned the prophet were the king, his princes, and council; and yet did one man accuse them all of iniquity, and did boldly speak in the defence of him of whose innocence he was persuaded. And the same, I say, is the duty of every man in his vocation, but chiefly of the nobility which are joined with their kings, to bridle and repress their folly and blind rage. Which thing, if the nobility do not, neither yet labour to do: as they are traitors to their kings, so do they provoke the wrath of God against themselves and against the realm in which they abuse the authority which they have received of God to maintain virtue and to repress vice. For hereof I would your honours were most certainly persuaded, that God will neither excuse nobility nor people, but the nobility least of all, that obey and follow their kings in manifest iniquity; but with the same vengeance will God punish the prince, people, and nobility, conspiring together against him and his holy ordinances; as in the punishment taken upon Pharaoh, Israel, Judah, and Babylon is evidently to be seen. For Pharaoh was not drowned alone, but his captain, chariots, and great army drank the same cup with him. The kings of Israel and Judah were not punished without company; but with them were murdered the counsellors, their princes imprisoned, and their people led captive. And why? Because none was found so faithful to God, that he durst enterprise to resist or stand against the manifest impiety of their princes. And therefore was God's wrath poured forth upon the one and the other.

But the more ample discourse of this argument I defer to better opportunity. Only at this time, I thought [it] expedient to admonish you, that before God it shall not excuse you to allege, "We are no kings, and therefore neither can we reform religion, nor yet defend the persecuted." Consider, my lords, that you are powers ordained by God (as before is declared), and therefore does the reformation of religion, and the defence of such as unjustly are oppressed, appertain to your charge and care, which thing shall the law of God, universally given to be kept of all men, most evidently declare; which is my last and most assured reason, why, I say, you ought to remove from honours and punish with death such as God has condemned by his own mouth. After that Moses had declared what was true religion: to wit, to honour God as he commanded, adding nothing to his word, neither yet diminishing anything from it (Deut. 12:32); and also after he had vehemently exhorted the same law to be observed; he denounced the punishment against the transgressors in these words, "If thy brother, son, daughter, wife, or neighbour, whom thou lovest as thine own life, solicit thee secretly, saying, 'Let us go serve other gods,' whom neither thou, nor thy fathers have known; consent not to him; hear him not. Let not thine eye spare him; show him no indulgence or favour; hide him not; but utterly kill him. Let thy hand be the first upon him, that he may be slain, and after the hand of the whole people" (Deut. 13:6-9, 27). Of these words of Moses are two things, appertaining to our purpose, to be noted: [49]Former, that such as solicit only to idolatry ought to be punished to death, without favour or respect of persons. For he that will not suffer man to spare his son, his daughter, nor his wife, but straitly commands punishment to be taken upon idolaters (have they never so near conjunction with us), will not wink at the idolatry of others, of what estate or condition so ever they be.

[50]It is not unknown that the prophets had revelations of God which were not common to the people: as Samuel had the revelation that Eli and his posterity should be destroyed; that Saul should first be king, and thereafter that he should be rejected; that David should reign for him (1 Sam. 3:11-14; 9:15-17; 15:10-31). Micaiah understood by [a] vision that Ahab should be killed in battle against the Syrians (1 Kings 22:17-28). Elijah saw that the dogs should eat Jezebel in the fortress of Jezreel (1 Kings 21:17-24). Elisha did see hunger come upon Israel for the space of seven years (2 Kings 8:1-3). Jeremiah did foresee the destruction of Jerusalem and the time of their captivity. And so diverse other prophets had diverse revelations of God, which the people did not otherwise understand but by their affirmation; and therefore in those days were the prophets named *seers*, because God did open unto them that which was hid from the multitude. Now, if any man might have claimed any privilege from the rigour of the law, or might have justified his fact, it should have been the prophet. For he might have alleged for himself his singular prerogative, that he had above other men, to have God's will revealed unto him by vision or by dream, that his pleasure was to be honoured in that manner, in such a place, and by such means. But all such excuses does God remove, commanding that the prophet that shall solicit the people to serve strange gods shall die the death, notwithstanding that he allege for himself dream, vision, or revelation. Yea, although he promises miracles, and also that such things as he promises come to pass: yet, I say, God commanded that no credit be given to him, but that he die the death, because he teaches apostasy, and defection from God (Deut. 13:1-5).

Hereof your honours may easily espy, that none provoking the people to idolatry ought to be exempted from the punishment of death. For if neither that inseparable conjunction (which God himself has sanctified bewixt man and wife), neither that unspeakable love grafted in nature (which is betwixt the father and the son), neither yet that reverence which God's people ought to bear to the prophets, can excuse any man to spare the offender, or to conceal his offence (Deut. 13:6-11): what excuse can man pretend, which God will accept? Evident it is, that no estate, condition, nor honour can exempt the idolater from the hands of God, when he shall call him to accounts, or shall inflict punishment upon him for his offence: how shall it then excuse the people that they, according to God's commandment, punish not to death such as shall solicit or violently draw the people to idolatry?

And this is the first, which I would your honours should note, of the former words: to wit, that no person is exempted from punishment, if he can be manifestly convicted to have provoked or led the people to idolatry. And this is most evidently declared in that solemn oath and covenant which Asa made with the people to serve God, and to maintain his religion, adding this penalty to the transgressors of it: to wit, "that whosoever should not seek the Lord God of Israel should be killed: were he great, or were he small, were it man, or were it woman" (2 Chron. 15:13). And of this oath was the Lord pleased; he was found of them, and gave them rest on every part, because they sought him with their whole heart, and did swear to punish the offenders, according to the precept of his law, without respect of persons. And this is it which, I say, I would your honours should note for the first, that no idolater can be exempted from punishment by God's law.

The second is, that the punishment of such crimes as are idolatry, blasphemy, and others, that touch the majesty of God does not appertain to kings and chief rulers only, but also to the whole body of that people, and to every member of the same, according to the vocation of every man, and according to that possibility and occasion which God does minister to revenge the injury done against his glory, what time that impiety is manifestly known. And that does Moses more plainly speak in these words: "If in any of thy cities," says he, "which the Lord thy God giveth unto thee to dwell in them, thou shalt hear this bruit [*report*]: 'There are some men, the sons of Belial, passed forth from thee, and have solicited the citizens of their cities by these words, "Let us go and serve strange gods which you have not known;"' search and inquire diligently; and if it be true that such abomination is done in the midst of thee, thou shalt utterly strike the inhabitants of that city with the sword. Thou shalt destroy it, and whatsoever is within it; thou shalt gather the spoil of it in the midst of the marketplace; thou shalt burn that city with fire, and the spoil of it to the Lord thy God, that it may be a heap of stones for ever; neither shall it be any more builded. Let nothing of that execration cleave to thy hand; that the Lord may turn from the fury of his wrath, and be moved towards thee with inward affection" (Deut. 13:12-17).

[51]Plain it is that Moses speaks, nor gives not charge to kings, rulers, and judges only, but he commands the whole body of the people, yea, and every member of the same according to their possibility. And who dare be so impudent as to deny this to be most reasonable and just? For seeing that God had delivered the whole body from bondage, and to the whole multitude had given his law, and to the twelve tribes had he so distributed the inheritance of the land of Canaan, that no family could complain that it was neglected: was not the whole and every member indebted to confess and acknowledge the benefits of God? Yea, had it not been the part of every man to have studied to keep the possession which he had received? (Deut. 28, 30) Which thing God did plainly pronounce they should not do, except that in their hearts they did sanctify the Lord God (Deut. 7); that they embraced, and inviolably kept his religion established; and finally, except they did cut out iniquity from amongst them, declaring themselves earnest enemies to those abominations (which God himself declared so vehemently to hate, that first he commanded the whole inhabitants of that country to be destroyed, and all monuments of their idolatry to be broken down; and thereafter he also straitly commanded that a city declining to idolatry should fall in the edge of the sword, and that the spoil of the same should be burned, no portion of it reserved).

[52]To the carnal man this may appear a rigorous and severe judgment; yea, it may rather seem to be pronounced in a rage than in wisdom. For what city was ever yet, in which, to man's judgment, were not to be found many innocent persons, as infants, children, and some simple and ignorant souls, who neither did nor could consent to such impiety? And yet we find no exception, but all are appointed to the cruel death. And as concerning the city, and the spoil of the same, man's reason cannot think, but that it might have been better bestowed than to be consumed with fire (and so to profit no man). But in such cases God wills that all creatures stoop, cover their faces, and desist from reasoning, when commandment is given to execute his judgment.

Albeit I could adduce diverse causes of such severity, yet I will search [for] none other than the Holy Ghost has assigned. First, that all Israel, hearing the judgment, should fear to commit the like abomination. And secondarily, that the Lord might turn from the fury of his anger, might be moved towards the people with inward affection, be merciful unto them, and multiply them, according to his oath made unto their fathers. Which reasons, as they are sufficient in God's children to correct the murmuring of the grudging flesh; so ought they to provoke every man, as before I have said, to declare himself enemy to that which so highly provokes the wrath of God against the whole people. [53]For where Moses says, "Let the city be burned, and let no part of the spoil cleave to thy hand; that the Lord may return from the fury of his wrath," etc. (Deut. 13:16-17), he plainly does signify that, by the defection and idolatry of a few, God's wrath is kindled against the whole, which is never quenched till such punishment be taken upon the offenders; that whosoever served them in their idolatry be brought to destruction, because that it is execrable and accursed before God; and therefore he wills not that it be reserved for any use of his people.

I am not ignorant that this law was not put in execution, as God commanded. But what did thereof ensue and follow, histories declare: to wit, plague after plague, till Israel and Judah were led into captivity, as the books of Kings do witness. The consideration whereof makes me more bold to affirm, that it is the duty of every man, that lists to escape the plague and punishment of God, to declare himself enemy to idolatry not only in heart hating the same, but also in external gesture, declaring that he laments, if he can do no more, for such abominations (Ezek. 9). Which thing was shown to the prophet Ezekiel, what time he gave him to understand why he would destroy Judah with Israel; and that he would remove his glory from the temple and place that he had chosen, and so pour forth his wrath and indignation upon the city (Ezek. 8-9), that was full of blood and apostasy, which became so impudent, that it durst be bold to say, "The Lord hath left the earth, and seeth not" (Ezek. 8:12). At this time, I say, the Lord revealed in [a] vision to his prophet, who they were that should find favour in that miserable destruction: to wit, "those that did mourn and lament for all the abominations done in the city, on whose foreheads did God command to print and seal Tau," (Ezek. 9:4)[54] to the end that the destroyer, who was commanded to strike the rest without mercy, should not hurt them in whom that sign was found.

Of these premises, I suppose it is evident, that the punishment of idolatry does not appertain to kings only, but also to the whole people, yea, to every member of the same, according to his possibility. For that is a thing most assured, that no man can mourn, lament, and bewail for those things which he will not remove to the uttermost of his power. [55]If this be required of the whole people, and of every man in his vocation, what shall be required of you, my lords, whom God has raised up to be princes and rulers above your brethren, whose hands he has armed with the sword of justice? yea, whom he has appointed to be as bridles, to repress the rage and insolence of your kings, whensoever they pretend manifestly to transgress God's blessed ordinance?

[56]If any think that this my affirmation, touching the punishment of idolaters, is contrary to the practice of the apostles, who, finding the Gentiles in idolatry, did call them to repentance, requiring no such punishment: [57]let the same man understand, that the Gentiles, before the preaching of Christ, lived, as the apostle speaks, without God in the world, drowned in idolatry, according to the blindness and ignorance in which then they were held, as a profane nation, whom God had never openly avowed to be his people, had never received in his household, neither given unto them laws to be kept in religion nor polity; and therefore did not his Holy Ghost, calling them to repentance, require of them any corporeal punishment, according to the rigour of the law, unto the which they were never subjects, as they that were strangers from the commonwealth of Israel.

But if any think, that after the Gentiles were called from their vain conversation, and by embracing Christ Jesus were received into the number of Abraham's children, and so made one people with the believing Jews (Eph. 2): if any think, I say, that then they were not bound to the same obedience which God required of his people Israel, what time he confirmed his league and covenant with them, the same man appears to make Christ inferior to Moses, and contrary to the law of his heavenly Father. For if the contempt or transgression of Moses' law was worthy of death, what should we judge the contempt of Christ's ordinances to be? I mean after they are once received. And if Christ be not come to dissolve, but to fulfill the law of his heavenly Father, shall the liberty of his gospel be an occasion that the especial glory of his Father be trodden under foot, and regarded of no man? God forbid!

[58]The especial glory of God is that such as profess themselves to be his people should hearken to his voice; and amongst all the voices of God revealed to the world, touching punishment of vices, none is more evident (neither more severe) than is that which is pronounced against idolatry, [and] the teachers and maintainers of the same (1 Sam. 15). And therefore I fear not to affirm, that the Gentiles (I mean every city, realm, province, or nation amongst the Gentiles, embracing Christ Jesus and his true religion) are bound to the same league and covenant that God made with his people Israel, what time he promised to root out the nations before them, in these words: "Beware that thou make any covenant with the inhabitants of the land to the which thou comest, lest perchance that this come in ruin (that is, be destruction to thee); but thou shalt destroy their altars, break their altars, and cut down their groves. Fear no strange gods, worship them not, neither yet make you sacrifice to them. But the Lord, who in his great power and outstretched arm hath brought you out of the land of Egypt, shall you fear; him shall you honour; him shall you worship; to himshall you make sacrifice; his statutes, judgments, laws and commandments you shall keep and observe. This is the covenant which I have made with you, saith the Eternal, forget it not; neither yet fear ye other gods, but fear you the Lord your God, and he shall deliver you from the hands of all your enemies" (Ex. 34).

To this same law, I say, and covenant are the Gentiles no less bound, than sometime were the Jews, whensoever God does illuminate the eyes of any multitude, province, people, or city, and puts the sword in their own hand to remove such enormities from amongst them, as before God they know to be abominable. Then, I say, they are no less bound to purge their dominions, cities, and countries from idolatry, than were the Israelites, what time they received the possession of the land of Canaan. And moreover, I say, if any go about to erect and set up idolatry, or to teach defection from God, after that the verity has been received and approved, that then, not only the magistrates, to whom the sword is committed, but also the people, are bound, by that oath which they have made to God, to revenge to the uttermost of their power the injury done against his Majesty.

In universal defections, and in a general revolt, such as was in Israel after Jeroboam, there is a diverse consideration. For then, because the whole people were together conspired against God, there could none be found that would execute the punishment which God had commanded, till God raised up Jehu, whom he had appointed for that purpose. And the same is to be considered in all other general defections, such as this day be in the Papistry, where all are blinded, and all are declined from God, and that of long continuance, so that no ordinary justice can be executed, but the punishment must be reserved to God, and unto such means as he shall appoint.

But I do speak of such a number as, after they have received God's perfect religion, do boldly profess the same, notwithstanding that some, or the most part, fall back (as of late days was in England): unto such a number, I say, it is lawful to punish the idolaters with death, if by any means God gives them the power. For so did Joshua and Israel determine to have done against the children of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh, for their suspected apostasy and defection from God (Josh. 22:10-34). And the whole tribes did in very deed execute that sharp judgment against the tribe of Benjamin, for a less offence than for idolatry (Judges 20). And the same ought to be done wheresoever Christ Jesus and his evangel are so received in any realm, province, or city, that the magistrates and the people have solemnly avowed and promised to defend the same, as under King Edward of late days was done in England. In such places, I say, it is not only lawful to punish to the death such as labour to subvert the true religion, but the magistrates and people are bound to do so, unless they will provoke the wrath of God against themselves. And therefore I fear not to affirm, that it had been the duty of the nobility, judges, rulers, and people of England, not only to have received and stood against Mary, that Jezebel whom they call their queen, but also to have punished her to the death, with all the sort of her idolatrous priests, together with all such as should have assisted her, what time that she and they openly began to suppress Christ's evangel, to shed the blood of the saints of God, and to erect that most devilish idolatry, the papistical abominations, and his [*the pope's*] usurped tyranny, which once most justly by common oath was banished from that realm.

But because I cannot at this present [time] discuss this argument, as it appertains, I am compelled to omit it to better opportunity. And so returning to your honours, I say that if you confess yourselves baptized in the Lord Jesus, of necessity you must confess that the care of his religion does appertain to your charge. And if you know that in your hands God has put the sword for the causes expressed above, then you cannot deny, but that the punishment of obstinate and malapert idolaters (such as your bishops are) does appertain to your office, if after admonition they continue obstinate.

I am not ignorant what is the vain defence of your proud prelates. They claim first a prerogative and a privilege that they are exempt and that by consent of councils and emperors from all jurisdiction of the temporality. And secondarily, when they are convicted of manifest impieties, abuses, and enormities (as well in their manners as in religion), neither fear nor shame they to affirm, that things so long established cannot suddenly be reformed, although they be corrupted, but with process of time they promise to take order. But in few words I answer, that no privilege granted against the ordinances and statutes of God is to be observed, although all councils and men in the earth have appointed the same. But it is against God's ordinance that idolaters, murderers, false teachers, and blasphemers, shall be exempted from punishment, as before is declared. And therefore it is in vain that they claim for privilege, when God says, "The murderer shalt thou rive from my altar, that he may die" (Num. 35). And as to the order and reformation which they promise: that is to be looked for or hoped for when Satan, whose children and slaves they are, can change his nature.

This answer I doubt not shall suffice the sober and godly reader. But yet to the end that they [*the prelates*] may further see their own confusion, and that your honours may better understand what you ought to do in so manifest a corruption and defection from God, I ask of them, what assurance they have for this their immunity, exemption, or privilege? Who is the author of it? And what fruit has it produced?

[59]And first, I say, that of God they have no assurance, neither yet can he be proved to be author of any such privilege. But the contrary is easy to be seen. For God in establishing his orders in Israel, did so subject Aaron (in his priesthood being the figure of Christ) to Moses, that he feared not to call him in judgment, and to constrain him to give account of his wicked deed in consenting to idolatry, as the history does plainly witness. For thus it is written: "Then Moses took the calf which they had made, and burned it with fire, and did grind it to powder, and scattering it in the water, gave it to drink to the children of Israel;" declaring hereby the vanity of their idol, and the abomination of the same. And thereafter, "Moses said to Aaron, 'What hath this people done to thee, that thou shouldest bring upon it so great a sin?'" (Ex. 32:20-21).

Thus, I say, does Moses call and accuse Aaron of the destruction of the whole people; and yet he perfectly understood that God had appointed him to be the high priest, that he should bear upon his shoulders and upon his breast the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, for whom he was appointed to make sacrifice, prayers, and supplications. [60]He knew his dignity was so great, that only he might enter within the most holy place; but neither could his office nor dignity exempt him from judgment when he had offended.

If any object, Aaron at that time was not anointed, and therefore was he subject to Moses: I have answered, that Moses, being taught by the mouth of God, did perfectly understand to what dignity Aaron was appointed, and yet he feared not to call him in judgment, and to compel him to make answer for his wicked fact. But if this answer does not suffice, yet shall the Holy Ghost witness further in the matter. Solomon removed from honour Abiathar being the high priest, and commanded him to cease from all function, and to live as a private man. Now if the unction did exempt the priest from jurisdiction of the civil magistrate, Solomon did offend, and injured Abiathar; for he was anointed, and had carried the ark before David. But God does not reprove the fact of Solomon, neither yet does Abiathar claim any prerogative by the reason of his office, but rather does the Holy Ghost approve the fact of Solomon, saying, "Solomon ejected forth Abiathar that he should not be the priest of [the] Lord; that the word of the Lord might be performed, which he spake upon the house of Eli" (1 Kings 2:27; 1 Sam. 3:11-14).

And Abiathar did think that he obtained great favour, in that he did escape the present death, which by his conspiracy he had deserved. If any yet reason, that Abiathar was no otherwise subject to the judgment of the king, but as he was appointed to be the executor of that sentence which God before had pronounced: as I will not greatly deny that reason, so I require, that every man consider, [61]that the same God who pronounced sentence against Eli and his house, has also pronounced that idolaters, whoremongers, murderers, and blasphemers shall have neither portion in the kingdom of God, neither ought to be permitted to bear any rule in his church and congregation. Now if the unction and office saved not Abiathar, because God's sentence must needs be performed, can any privilege granted by man be a buckler to malefactors, that they shall not be subject to the punishments pronounced by God? I think no man will be so foolish as to affirm so. For it is a thing more than evident, that the whole priesthood in the time of the law was bound to give obedience to the civil powers; and if any member of the same was found criminal, the same was subject to the punishment of the sword, which God had put in the hand of the magistrate. And this ordinance of his Father did not Christ disannul, but rather did confirm the same, commanding tribute to be paid for himself and for Peter (Matt. 17:24-27); who perfectly knowing the mind of his Master, thus writes in his epistle, "Submit yourselves to all manner [of] ordinance of man" he excepts such as be expressly repugning to God's commandment "for the Lord's sake; whether it be to king, as the chief head, or unto rulers, as unto them that are sent by him for punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well" (1 Pet. 2:13-14; Acts 4:18-20; 5:28-29).

The same does the apostle Paul most plainly command in these words, "Let every soul be subject to the superior powers" (Rom. 13:1). Which places make evident, that neither Christ, neither his apostles, have given any assurance of this immunity and privilege, which men of the church (as they will be termed) do this day claim. Yea, it was a thing unknown to the primitive church many years after the days of the apostles. For Chrysostom, who served the church at Constantinople four hundred years after Christ's ascension (and after that corruption was greatly increased), does yet thus write upon the aforesaid words of the apostle: [62]"This precept," says he, "does not appertain to such as are called seculars only, but even to those that are priests and religious men."[63] And after he adds, "Whether you be apostle, evangelist, prophet, or whatsoever you be, you cannot be exempted from this subjection."

Hereof it is plain that Chrysostom did not understand that God had exempted any person from obedience and subjection of the civil power; neither yet that he was author of such exemption and privilege, as Papists do this day claim. And the same was the judgment and uniform doctrine of the primitive church many years after Christ. Your honours do wonder, I doubt not, from what fountain then did this their immunity, as they term it, and singular privilege spring. I shall shortly touch that, which is evident in their own law and histories.

When the bishops of Rome, the very Antichrists, had (partly by fraud and partly by violence) usurped the superiority of some places in Italy, and most unjustly had spoiled the emperors of their rents and possessions, and had also murdered some of their officers (as histories do witness), [64]then began pope after pope to practice and devise how they should be exempted from judgment of princes, and from the equity of laws; and in this point they were most vigilant, till at length iniquity did so prevail in their hands, according as Daniel had before prophesied of them, that this sentence was pronounced: "Neither by the emperor, neither by the clergy, neither yet by the people, shall the judge be judged." [65]"God wills," says Symmachus, "that the causes of others be determined by men; but without all question, he has reserved the bishop of this seat (understanding Rome) to his own judgment."[66]

[67]And hereof diverse popes and expositors of their laws would seem to give reasons. For, says Agatho, "All the precepts of the apostolic seat are assured, as by the voice of God himself."[68]

The author of the gloss upon their canon affirms, that if all the world should pronounce sentence against the pope, yet should his sentence prevail. [69]For, says he, "The pope has a heavenly will, and therefore he may change the nature of things; he may apply the substance of one thing to another, and of nothing he may make somewhat; and [of] that sentence which was nothing, that is, by his mind false and unjust, he may make somewhat that is true and just. For (says he) in all things that please him, his will is for reason; neither is there any man that may ask of him, 'Why do you so?' For he may dispense above the law, and of injustice he may make justice; for he has the fullness of all power."

And many other most blasphemous sentences did they pronounce, every one after another (which for shortness sake I omit), till at the end they obtained this most horrible decree:[70] that albeit in life and conversation they were so wicked and detestable, that not only they condemned themselves, but that also they drew to hell and perdition many thousands with them, yet that none should presume to reprehend or rebuke them. [71]This being established for the head (albeit not without some contradiction, for some emperors did require due obedience of them, as God's word commanded and ancient bishops had given before to emperors, and to their laws; but Satan so prevailed in his suit before the blind world, that the former sentences were confirmed, which power being granted to the head), then began provision to be made for the rest of the members in all realms and countries where they made residence. The fruit whereof we see to be this: that none of that pestilent generation (I mean the vermin of the papistical order) will be subject to any civil magistrate, how enormous that ever his crime is, but will be reserved to their own ordinary,[72] as they term it. And what fruits have hereof ensued, be the world never so blind, it cannot but witness. For how their head, that Roman Antichrist, has been occupied since the granting of such privileges, histories do witness, and of late the most part of Europe (subject to the plague of God, to fire and sword), by his procurement has felt, and this day does feel.

The pride, ambition, envy, excess, fraud, spoil, oppression, murder, filthy life, and incest, that are used and maintained amongst that rabble of priests friars, monks, canons, bishops, and cardinals, cannot be expressed. [73]I fear not to affirm, neither doubt I to prove, that the papistical church is further degenerated from the purity of Christ's doctrine, from the footsteps of the apostles, and from the manners of the primitive church, than was the church of the Jews from God's holy statutes, what time it did crucify Christ Jesus, the only Messiah, and most cruelly persecute his apostles. And yet will our Papists claim their privileges and ancient liberties, which if you grant unto them, my lords, [74]you shall assuredly drink the cup of God's vengeance with them, and shall be reputed, before his presence, companions of thieves and maintainers of murderers, as is before declared. For their immunity and privilege, whereof so greatly they boast, is nothing else, but as if thieves, murderers, or brigands [*bandits*] should conspire amongst themselves, that they would never answer in judgment before any lawful magistrate, to the end that their theft and murder should not be punished; even such, I say, is their wicked privilege, which neither they have of God the Father, neither of Christ Jesus (who has revealed his Father's will to the world), neither yet of the apostles nor primitive church, as before is declared: but it is a thing conspired amongst themselves, to the end that their iniquity, detestable life, and tyranny shall neither be repressed nor reformed.

And if they object, that godly emperors did grant and confirm the same: I answer, that the godliness of no man is or can be of sufficient authority to justify a foolish and ungodly fact, such I mean as God has not allowed by his word. For Abraham was a godly man, but the denial of his wife was a fact as no godly man ought to imitate; the same I might show of David, Hezekiah, and Josiah, unto whom I think no man of judgment will prefer any emperor since Christ, in holiness and wisdom; and yet are not all their facts (no, even such as they appeared to have done for good causes) to be approved nor followed. And therefore, I say, as error and ignorance remain always with the most perfect man in this life, so must their works be examined by another rule than by their own holiness, if they shall be approved. But if this answer does not suffice, then I will answer more shortly, that no godly emperor since Christ's ascension has granted any such privilege to any such church or person as they, the whole generation of Papists, are at this day.

I am not ignorant, that some emperors, of a certain zeal, and for some considerations, granted liberties to the true [and] afflicted church, for their maintenance against tyrants. But what serves this for the defence of their tyranny? If the law must be understood according to the mind of the lawgiver, then they must first prove themselves Christ's true and afflicted church, before they can claim any privilege to appertain to them; for only to that church were the privileges granted. It will not be their glorious titles, neither yet the long possession of the name, that can prevail in this so weighty a cause; for all those had the church of Jerusalem, which did crucify Christ and did condemn his doctrine. We offer to prove by their fruits and tyranny, by the prophets, and plain scriptures of God, what trees and generation they are: to wit, unfruitful and rotten, apt for nothing but to be cut and cast into hell fire; yea, that they are the very kingdom of Antichrist, of whom we are commanded to beware. And therefore, my lords, to return to you seeing that God has armed your hands with the sword of justice; seeing that his law most straitly commands idolaters and false prophets to be punished with death; and that you are placed above your subjects to reign as fathers over their children; and further, seeing that not only I, but with me many thousand famous, godly, and learned persons, accuse your bishops (and the whole rabble of the papistical clergy) of idolatry, of murder, and of blasphemy committed against God: it appertains to your honours to be vigilant and careful in so weighty a matter.

The question is not of earthly substance, but of the glory of God, and of the salvation of yourselves, and of your brethren subject to your charge: in which, if you, after this plain admonition, be negligent, there rests no excuse by reason of ignorance. For, in the name of God, I require of you, that the cause of religion may be tried in your presence by the plain and simple word of God; that your bishops be compelled to desist from their tyranny; that they be compelled to make answer for the neglecting of their office, for the substance of the poor, which unjustly they usurp and prodigally they do spend; but principally for the false and deceitful doctrine which is taught and defended by their false prophets, flattering friars, and other such venomous locusts. Which thing, if with single eyes you do (preferring God's glory and the salvation of your brethren to all worldly commodity), then shall the same God, who solemnly does pronounce to honour those that do honour him, pour his benedictions plentifully upon you; he shall be your buckler, protection, and captain, and shall repress by his strength and wisdom whatsoever Satan, by his supporters, shall imagine against you.

I am not ignorant that great troubles shall ensue your enterprise; for Satan will not be expelled from the possession of his usurped kingdom without resistance. But if you, as is said, preferring God's glory to your own lives, unfeignedly seek and study to obey his blessed will, then shall your deliverance be such, as evidently it shall be known, that the angels of the Eternal do watch, make war, and fight for those that unfeignedly fear the Lord. But if you refuse this my most reasonable and just petition, what defence that ever you appear to have before men, then shall God (whom in me you contemn) refuse you (Deut. 28). He shall pour forth contempt upon you, and upon your posterity after you (Lev. 26). The spirit of boldness and wisdom shall be taken from you, your enemies shall reign, and you shall die in bondage (Isa. 27, 30); yea, God shall cut down the unfruitful trees, when they do appear most beautifully to flourish, and shall so burn the root, that after of you shall neither twig nor branch again spring to glory.

Hereof I need not to adduce unto you examples from the former ages, and ancient histories. For your brethren, the nobility of England, are a mirror and glass in the which you may behold God's just punishment. For as they have refused him and his evangel, which once in mouth they did profess, so has he refused them, and has taken from them the spirit of wisdom, boldness, and of counsel. They see and feel their own misery, and yet they have no grace to avoid it. They hate the bondage of strangers, the pride of priests, and the monstiferous empire [*government*] of a wicked woman, and yet they are compelled to bow their necks to the yoke of the devil, to obey whatsoever the proud Spaniards and wicked Jezebel list to command; and finally, to stand like slaves, with cap in hand, till the servants of Satan, the shaven sort, call them to counsel. This fruit do they reap and gather of their former rebellion and unfaithfulness towards God; they are left confused in their own counsels. He whom, in his members (for the pleasure of a wicked woman) they have exiled, persecuted, and blasphemed, does now laugh them to scorn; [he] suffers them to be pined in bondage of most wicked men and, finally, shall adjudge them to the fire everlasting, except that speedily and openly they repent [of] their horrible treason, which against God, against his Son Christ Jesus, and against the liberty of their own native realm they have committed.

The same plagues shall fall upon you, be you assured, if you refuse the defence of his servants that call for your support. My words are sharp, but consider, my lords, that they are not mine, but that they are the threatenings of the Omnipotent, who assuredly will perform the voices of his prophets, how that ever carnal men despise his admonitions. [75]The sword of God's wrath is already drawn, which of necessity must needs strike, when grace offered is obstinately refused. You have been long in bondage of the devil: blindness, error, and idolatry prevailing against the simple truth of God in that your realm, in which God has made you princes and rulers. [76]But now does God of his great mercy call you to repentance, before he pours forth the uttermost of his vengeance. [77]He cries to your ears that your religion is nothing but idolatry; he accuses you of the blood of his saints, which has been shed by your permission, assistance, and powers: for the tyranny of those raging beasts should have no force, if by your strength they were not maintained. Of those horrible crimes does God now accuse you, not of purpose to condemn you, but mercifully to absolve and pardon you (as sometime he did those whom Peter accused to have killed the Son of God), so that you be not of mind nor purpose to justify your former iniquity (Acts 2:23).

Iniquity I call not only the crimes and offences which have been (and yet remain) in your manners and lives; but also that which appears before men most holy, I offer (with hazard of my life) to prove [to be] abomination before God: [78]that is, your whole religion to be so corrupt and vain, that no true servant of God can communicate with it, because that in so doing, he should manifestly deny Christ Jesus and his eternal verity. I know that your bishops, accompanied with the swarm of the papistical vermin, shall cry, "A damned heretic ought not to be heard." [79]But remember, my lords, what in the beginning I have protested, upon which ground I continually stand: to wit, that I am no heretic nor deceitful teacher, but the servant of Christ Jesus, a preacher of his infallible verity, innocent in all that they can lay to my charge concerning my doctrine, and that therefore by them (being enemies to Christ) I am unjustly damned. From which cruel sentence I have appealed, and do appeal, as before mention is made; in the meantime most humbly requiring your honours to take me in your protection, to be auditors of my just defences, granting unto me the same liberty which Ahab, a wicked king and Israel, at that time a blinded people granted to Elijah in the like case (1 Kings 18): that is, that your bishops and the whole rabble of your clergy may be called before you, and before that people whom they have deceived; that I be not condemned by multitude, by custom, by authority or law devised by man, but that God himself may be judge betwixt me and my adversaries. Let God, I say, speak by his law, by his prophets, by Christ Jesus, or by his apostles, and so let him pronounce what religion he approves; and then be my enemies never so many, and appear they never so strong and so learned, no more do I fear victory than did Elijah, being but one man against a multitude of Baal's priests.

[80]And if they think to have advantage by their councils and doctors, this I further offer: to admit the one and the other as witnesses in all matters debatable, three things (which justly cannot be denied) being granted unto me. First, that the most ancient councils nighest to the primitive church, in which the learned and godly fathers did examine all matters by God's word, may be held of most authority. Secondarily, that no determination of councils nor man be admitted against the plain verity of God's word, nor against the determinations of those four chief councils, whose authority has been and is held by them equal with the authority of the four evangelists. And last, that to no doctor be given greater authority than Augustine requires to be given to his writings:[81] to wit, if he plainly proves not his affirmation by God's infallible word, that then his sentence be rejected, and imputed to the error of a man. These things granted and admitted, I shall no more refuse the testimonies of councils and doctors, than shall my adversaries. But and if they will justify those councils which maintain their pride and usurped authority, and will reject those which plainly have condemned all such tyranny, negligence, and wicked lives, as bishops now do use; and if, further, they will snatch a doubtful sentence of a doctor, and refuse his mind when he speaks plainly, then will I say, that all [*every*] man is a liar, that credit ought not to be given to an inconstant witness, and that no councils ought to prevail nor be admitted against the sentence which God has pronounced.

And thus, my lords, in a few words to conclude, I have offered unto you a trial of my innocence. I have declared unto you what God requires of you, being placed above his people as rulers and princes. I have offered unto you, and to the inhabitants of the realm, the verity of Christ Jesus; and with the hazard of my life, I presently offer to prove the religion which amongst you is maintained by fire and sword to be false, damnable, and diabolical. Which things if you refuse, defending tyrants in their tyranny, then dare I not flatter. But as it was commanded to Ezekiel boldly to proclaim, so I must cry to you "that you shall perish in your iniquity" (Ezek, 3, 33); that the Lord Jesus shall refuse so many of you as maliciously withstand his eternal verity; and in the day of his apparition, when all flesh shall appear before him, that he shall repel you from his company, and shall command you to the fire which never shall be quenched (Matt. 24, 26); and then neither shall the multitude be able to resist, neither yet the counsels of man be able to prevail, against that sentence which he shall pronounce (Dan. 12, Matt. 25).

God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, by the power of his Holy Spirit, so rule and dispose your hearts, that with simplicity you may consider the things that are offered, and that you may take such order in the same, as God in you may be glorified, and Christ's flock by you may be edified and comforted, to the praise and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose omnipotent Spirit rule your hearts in his true fear to the end.

Amen.

Notes

1. *Marginal note:* Every man ought to confess and reverence God's truth.

2. *Marginal note:* Vain religion or idolatry

3. *Marginal note:* A sentence pronounced

4. *Marginal note:* Apellation of the same

5. *Marginal note:* The request of John Knox

6. *Marginal note:* The petition of Protestants

7. *Marginal note:* The petition of John Knox

8. *Marginal note:* Note well

9. *Marginal note:* Answer to objection

10. *Marginal note:* Note

11. *Marginal note:* The appellation is just and lawful

12. *Marginal note:* God's messengers may appeal from unjust sentences, and civil powers are bound to admit them

13. *Marginal note:* Advert

14. *Marginal note:* The princes did absolve the prophet whom the priests had condemned

15. *Marginal note:* The meaning of these words, "I am in your hands," etc.

16. *Marginal note:* The causes of his appellation, and why he ought to have been defended

17. *Marginal note:* Just cause of appellation

18. *Marginal note:* Why Paul would admit none of the Levitical order to judge in his cause.

19. *Marginal note:* Upon what reasons the appellation of Paul was grounded

20. *Marginal note:* The cause is to be regarded, and not the person

21. *Marginal note:* Let the cause be noted

22. *Marginal note:* Answer to an objection or doubt

23. *Marginal note:* The petition of John Knox

24. *Marginal note:* The singular honours which magistrates receive of God ought to move them with all diligence to promote his religion

25. *Marginal note:* The duties of magistrates

26. *Marginal note:* In what points are powers bound to their subjects

27. *Marginal note:* Let them similitude be noted

28. *Marginal note:* It is not enough that rulers oppress not their subjects

29. *Marginal note:* The offer of John Knox and his accusation intended against the papistical bishops

30. *Marginal note:* Note: if powers provide not for instruction of their subjects, they do never rule above them for their profit

31. *Marginal note:* What Satan has obtained of the blind world

32. *Marginal note:* The matters and reformation of religion appertain to the care of the civil power

33. *Marginal note:* Note

34. *Marginal note:* The facts of godly kings are interpretation of the law and declaration of their power

35. *Marginal note:* Note

36. *Marginal note:* Advert that the king takes upon him to command the priests

37. *Marginal note:* Note

38. *Marginal note:* The king commanded the priests

39. *Marginal note:* The facts of the godly kings in Judah do appertain to the powers among the Gentiles professing Christ

40. *Marginal note:* Epist. 50

41. *Marginal note:* Advert

42. *Marginal note:* Note well

43. *Marginal note:* Augustine's words

44. *Marginal note:* Advert the mind of Augustine

45. *Marginal note:* In the two sorts ought kings to serve God

46. *Marginal note:* O that the world should understand!

47. *Marginal note:* Note

48. *Marginal note:* An answer to the second objection

49. *Marginal note:* Idolatry ought to be punished without respect of persons

50. *Marginal note:* If any estate might have claimed privilege, it was prophets

51. *Marginal note:* Why every man in Israel was bound to obey God's commandment

52. *Marginal note:* God's judgment to the carnal man appears rigorous

53. *Marginal note:* For the idolatry of a small number is God's wrath kindled against the multitude not punishing the offenders

54. So in the original edition [Ezek. 9:4]. In our present version the words are, "and *set a mark* upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof." [D.L.]

55. *Marginal note:* Note

56. *Marginal note:* An answer to an objection

57. *Marginal note:* Why no law was executed against the Gentiles, being idolaters

58. *Marginal note:* The special honour which God requires of his people

59. *Marginal note:* God is not the author of any privilege granted to bishops, that they be exempted from the power of the civil sword

60. *Marginal note:* The dignity of Aaron did not exempt him from judgment

61. *Marginal note:* Note well

62. *Marginal note:* Chrysostom upon Rom. 13

63. *Marginal note:* Let the Papists answer Chrysostom

64. *Marginal note:* Let their own histories witness

65. *Marginal note:* The mouth of the beast speaking great things

66. *Marginal note:* Dist. 9, ques. 3

67. *Marginal note:* Their laws do witness

68. *Marginal note:* Dist. 19

69. *Marginal note: Cap. De Traslatione,* titul. 7

70. *Marginal note:* Distinc. 40

71. *Marginal note:* Note the equity of this commandment

72. "Ordinary," the established judge of ecclesiastical causes; one who has ordinary or immediate jurisdiction in matters ecclesiastical. [D.L.]

73. *Marginal note:* The matter is more than evident

74. *Marginal note:* Whosoever maintains the privileges of Papists shall drink the cup of God's vengeance with them

75. *Marginal note:* Let England and Scotland both advert

76. *Marginal note:* God calls to repentance before he strikes in his hot displeasure

77. *Marginal note:* Papists had no force if princes did not maintain them

78. *Marginal note:* No true servant of God may communicate with the papistical religion

79. *Marginal note:* An answer to the old objection that an heretic ought not to be heard

80. *Marginal note:* Touching councils and doctors

81. *Marginal note:* In *Prologue Retract.*

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This edition has been edited to reflect contemporary spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Bracketed words are supplied where needed to complete the sense of a sentence. Bracketed words *in italics* are inserted following some antiquated terms or phrases as a convenience to the modern reader. Therefore, the words in brackets are not a part of the original text.

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Back to swrb home page